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THE EFFECT OF CONTINENTAL PROTESTANT THEOLOGY
ON THE THINKING OF THOMAS CRANMER AND
THE RESULTING INFLUENCES ON THE REFORMATION
OF THE CHURCH IN ENGLAND

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CHAPTER I

THE PROBLEM

For hundreds of years there have been greatly divergent opinions among scholars of the English Reformation as to the importance and influence of Continental Protestant Reformers on the thinking of Thomas Cranmer. The viewpoints of scholars on this subject range from those who would claim that virtually no lasting influence was exerted by the Continent on Cranmer and the Reformation in England, to those who give all the credit to the formation of Anglicanism to the Protestants from Continental Europe.

I. THE PROBLEM

Statement of the problem. It is not within the scope of this work to present an apology for the Anglican Church but rather to look at some of the main influences from Continental European Reformed theology on Thomas Cranmer. While the main concern of this work is with the influences on Cranmer's thinking which reached him from Germany and Switzerland, the political and personal influences which were certainly a part of Cranmer's life cannot be ignored.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE BIOGRAPHICAL LITURATURE PERTINENT TO THOMAS CRANMER

The birth of a second son to the squire of the village of Aslockton in Nottinghamshire on July 2, 1489, was certainly not an event of any great consequence at the time. Squire Cranmer, while a gentleman, held a position of little importance and wealth in 15th Century England as the squire of a small rural village.¹ In an age in which one's family position, influence, and connections were of the greatest importance, Thomas Cranmer, as the second son of an obscure squire, was a long way from the top echelons of the social orders in which the powerful and wealthy of England moved and worked. It was this same Thomas Cranmer, with yet another "second son" born some two years after him and destined to become King Henry the VIII, who would effect vast changes which have greatly influenced England and the whole world.

There can be little doubt that few men in history have aroused such controversy and have had as much ink spilled in interpreting and analysing as well as attacking and defending every area and action of their lives as has Thomas

¹Albert F. Pollard, Thomas Cranmer and the English Reformation (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1906), p. 2.

Cranmer. As Jasper Ridley writes concerning Cranmer,

"For four hundred years he has been bitterly attacked and ardently defended by biographers and historians as if the righteousness of the English Reformation and the justification of the Church of England depended on the moral probity of the man who was its first Archbishop."²

The controversy around Cranmer commenced soon after his death, when Alan Cope attacked the late Archbishop in Bishop Cranmer's Recaulacyons; and when Nicholas Harpsfield, a judge at Cranmer's trial and hardly an unobvious observer, wrote The Pretended Divorce of Catherine of Aragon, in which Cranmer is derided for a considerable number of pages.³ A life of Cranmer was produced by the Protestant forces sometime between 1556 and 1559; the author of the first section concerning the early life of the Archbishop is unknown, and the second part is ascribed to either or both of two men who had served as Cranmer's chaplains. It was this early biography which was used by John Foxe in his second Latin edition of The Book of Martyrs. Fox later combined with this early biography of Cranmer information gleaned from Rolf Morice Cranmer's secretary and incorporated all this biographical information in the second English edition of The Book of Martyrs in 1570.⁴ These were only the opening literary guns

²Jasper Ridley, Thomas Cranmer (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962), p. 1.

³Ibid., p. 3.

⁴Ibid., p. 5.

of what was to be and still is a battle of manuscripts over the character, nature, and intention of Archbishop Cranmer in which the Protestants defend and the Catholics attack. The importance of becoming aware of the wide range and great number of works which are not only directly concerned with Thomas Cranmer but also treat him as a part of the English Reformation or the whole Protestant Reformation is that these works point up the very complex nature of the man Cranmer and the age in which he lived and worked. We must also be fully aware that all of the early works which deal with Archbishop Cranmer and the English Reformation and many of the newer ones are almost all occasional writings and are concerned with either defending or attacking Cranmer--not from an unbiased historical position, if such exists--but in order to prove or disprove the validity of the things he did and ultimately of the English Reformation. Cranmer is the perfect man from this period of the English Reformation for such attacks and defences because of his very complex nature, and because he lived and worked with such a span of rulers and machination of domestic and international politics. It was Cranmer who was Archbishop during the continually changing reign of Henry as well as Edward VI and the protectorate, and it was Cranmer who was to recant and then recant again before he died in the fire at Oxford when Mary was Queen of England. Jasper Ridley is again very close to the proper

understanding of why Thomas Cranmer has been so much speculated about for the last four hundred years when he writes,

"The Roman Catholics have hardly troubled to waste their ammunition on so easy a target as Henry VIII, and the Protestants have not been particularly concerned to defend the reputation of Thomas Cromwell; but the character of Cranmer has been a bitterly contested issue..."⁵

The overwhelming impression one feels after reading biographies with widely diverse opinions and positions concerning the character and intentions of Thomas Cranmer and his role in the Reformation of the Church in England is that these authors, whether they see the Archbishop as a hero and saint or as an arch heretic, are too concerned with their already pre-conceived approval or disapproval of the English Reformation to have any objectivity in the matter. The writings concerning the nature of the Archbishop's actions produced soon after his death are understandably all works of propaganda no matter who was the author. The traditional Roman Catholic view of Archbishop Cranmer has been that he was a time server, a man who acted without principles as the willing tool of a tyrannical king and as a result of his unprincipled opportunism led millions to heresy. The Protestant understanding and interpretation of Thomas Cranmer has traditionally been that of the conversion over a number of years

⁵Ridley, op. cit., p. 1.

of a man who was honestly and sincerely a Papist.⁶ The difficulty is that the myopic views of the Archbishop have been carried down until the present day in which historians are still seemingly blinded by their disapproval or approval of the English Reformation. The Life of Thomas Cranmer, a recent work by Theodore Maynard, a Roman Catholic scholar, has all the outward trappings of a fair and modern work on the Archbishop; yet one is still left with the impression that only because the author is obviously strongly English does Cranmer come off as well as he does. Maynard's Thomas Cranmer can only be described as a bungling, fumbling "Casper Milk-toast" who in the best English tradition muddles through with unfortunate results, from Maynard's point of view. Hilaire Belloc, also a Roman Catholic author, sees Cranmer in a much different perspective. To Belloc, Archbishop Cranmer is a Protestant secret agent of extraordinary skill and perseverance who only pretended to be a Catholic during all the reign of Henry VIII and the early days of Edward VI so that he could, at the best opportunity, establish Protestantism in England. As Hilaire Belloc writes concerning Cranmer at the time of the restoration of Mary and the Roman Mass in England,

"That Mass which he had himself sung with so much pomp year after year as Henry's man, which he had maintained, he and his master Somerset, with careful

⁶Ridley, op. cit., p. 11.

art during the first years of the reign of little Edward--that the new religion with which he was filled might be more carefully and gradually imposed in due time..."⁷

There is an obvious and unreconcilable conflict between the bungling and simple Archbishop Cranmer of Theodore Maynard and the skillful "espionage agent" of the Protestant army pictured by Belloc. One has a great deal of difficulty believing that anyone who had not been trained in espionage and subversion at a lesser institution than the Lenin School of Sabotage would be able to spend some sixteen years burning men who believed as he did while waiting for an opportunity to firmly establish Protestantism in England, as Belloc would have us believe.⁸ In the other extreme we cannot fully agree that Thomas Cranmer could have been the simple muddler depicted by Maynard. The reason for bringing out the obvious dichotomy between the interpretations of Thomas Cranmer as presented by Belloc and Maynard is to point up strongly the fact that even among authors who view the Archbishop from the same general bias there are still widely divergent understandings of his basic character and the reasons behind his actions.

Protestants have been more unanimous in their

⁷Hilaire Belloc, Cranmer (London-Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Co., 1931), p. 292.

⁸Ridley, op. cit., p. 11.

understanding and interpretation of Thomas Cranmer than those writing with a Roman Catholic point of view. This does not mean that there are not diverse opinions among the Protestants. An example of this can be seen when the Church of England was offended and shocked by statements concerning Thomas Cranmer made by Hallam in his Constitutional History of England. Yet it is Hallam's summary statement concerning the Archbishop which Ridley quotes in his modern work on Thomas Cranmer as the most accurate statement concerning the Archbishop made in the last four hundred years. These comments on the Archbishop's character made in 1821 are worth quoting here because they do in fact provide a good insight into Cranmer, particularly when we recall that they were written some one hundred and thirty years ago,

"If casting away all prejudice on either side, we weigh the character of this prelate in an equal balance, he will appear far indeed removed from that turpitude imputed to him by his enemies, yet not entitled to any extraordinary veneration. Though it is most eminently true of Cranmer that his faults were always the effect of circumstances and not of intention, yet this palliating consideration is rather weakened when we recollect that he consented to place himself in a station where those circumstances occurred."⁹

Hallam's statements concerning the nature of the Archbishop are moving towards a truer and less prejudiced understanding of Cranmer by clearing away, as much as is humanly possible,

⁹Ridley, op. cit., p. 8.

much of the religious and/or nationalistic bias which has so much surrounded investigations into the nature of the English Reformation and those who were responsible for it. The insights of Hallam into the character of Thomas Cranmer are useful as a starting point for investigation of the character, controlling motives, and influences on the Archbishop, in that they point out the necessity of moving back into the period in which Cranmer lived and worked, as well as indicating the need for as unbiased an approach as is possible. Only by having done so could Hallam have gained what insights he did. To understand truly the actions of Cranmer we must drop many of our modern assumptions, such as the right of free speech and action in which disagreement with superiors results, at the worst, in a loss of position and prestige. Nor can it be uncritically assumed that a man living in the Sixteenth Century thought and reasoned like a man of today. The actions of the Archbishop of Canterbury in the Sixteenth Century cannot be judged to be based on the same motives that such actions would indicate motivated a man in the Twentieth Century.

In order to gain a real and true understanding of what motivated Thomas Cranmer and to be able to understand and interpret to what extent these motives shaped and influenced his theology and his choice of methods in reforming the Church in England, an attempt must be made to view Cranmer's actions

and reasoning from the perspective of the Sixteenth Century and not the Twentieth. Therefore, an attempt must first be made to get "into" the age in which Cranmer lived and worked. The reactions of the Archbishop to different pressures and his decisions when faced with several possible avenues of choices, as well as his way of obtaining his purposes, must be evaluated and judged by the standards of his age as well as those of history. Secondly, every effort must be made to view what is discovered concerning the motives and influences on Thomas Cranmer as impartially as is possible. Some level of the necessary impartiality can be obtained by recognizing at the outset that it is not possible to validate or destroy the value of the English Reformation, the Anglican Church, or The Book of Common Prayer simply on the basis of the character and motives of Thomas Cranmer. This seemingly vain statement is not as foolish as one might think, for one of the main problems with many of the works on the English Reformation and Thomas Cranmer is the often seemingly unconscious need by the author to "prove" that Cranmer's motives or influences were, in the main, right or wrong. It is rather folly to assume that any revelations concerning Thomas Cranmer's motives and the influences which shaped his thinking will have any effect on the Anglican Church other than good. The universal nature of the Anglican Communion and the survival of Cranmer's The Book of Common Prayer would

seem to be almost self validating on the grounds of survival for such an extended period of time. Yet it is not within the scope of this work to present an apology for the Anglican Church or The Book of Common Prayer but rather to try to discover what the main influences were which shaped Cranmer's thinking as he partly led and partly was carried forward by the Reformation of the Church in England. This work will be particularly concerned with the influences on Cranmer's thinking which reached him from Germany and Switzerland, yet the domestic as well as the political and personal influences which were certainly a part of Cranmer's life cannot be ignored. All these often conflicting and changing pressures which the Archbishop had to face must be sorted out and evaluated, but always from the viewpoint of the Sixteenth Century with the advantage of the perspective of the Twentieth.

CHAPTER III

THE TRADITIONAL RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE ENGLISH MONARCHY AND CHURCH AUTHORITY

As we attempt to evaluate the forces of continental Protestantism which shaped and influenced the theology of Archbishop Cranmer, as he both led and was propelled by the whole series of events--political as well as religious--which we call the English Reformation, it is necessary to make some observations which, while outside the direct line of concern of this work, are needed if a clear and fair evaluation is to be made. There existed in 16th Century England factors concerning the political and religious situation which indicate that the nation was ready for a reform of the Church and therefore open and receptive to the ideas of a Luther, a Calvin, a Zwingli and others. It is not impossible to conceive of some kind of a reformation taking place within the Church in England even if the problem of a Tudor heir had not perpetuated the breach with Rome and set the Reformation in England into motion. Care must, however, be taken that the desire for a change in the Church within the British Isle is not over-emphasized, for there is a great deal of evidence that most of the common people and a majority of the clergy were perfectly willing that the Church continue on as before and, in fact, resented change of any sort.

There is also, about the whole beginning of the Reformation in England, an air of coincidence and the power of circumstance to effect history. The need to reform the Church in all areas of her life was certainly a part of the ethos of the age, yet an unprejudiced view of the young Henry VIII pictures him as indeed a "Defender of the Faith" and an "orthodox" Catholic until his death. It is political need, lust, and a real if misguided religious doubt concerning the marriage to his brother's widow combined with political circumstances that prevent the granting of a Papal annulment which led, at least on the surface, to the break with Rome.

That the 16th Century Church was in need of reform is voiced by all historians of the period even as they disagree over the way this reform should have been accomplished. Dom Gregory Dix in his great work on the liturgy states that the causes of the Reformation were two-fold: one being intellectual and theoretical, combined with the second, a practical objection to the gross superstition, corruption and mismanagement within the Church.¹⁰ Not only were the reformers repelled by the grosser interpretations of the Mass, which seemed to them counter to Scripture, but also by the abuses of worship brought about by the superstitions of the great mass of people who had for years been prevented from

¹⁰Dom Gregory Dix, The Shape of the Liturgy (Westminster: Dacre Press, 1945), p. 626.

truly participating in the liturgical worship of the Church.¹¹ The dislike by the reformers of what they considered completely untrue theology and a liturgical worship which had surrounded itself with much superstition combined with corruption in all forms and at all levels of Church government had indeed made the Church ready for reforming.

In addition to the influences which had been building up since the Middle Ages towards a situation which could only result in some kind of reformation of the Church, there were the specific religious and political considerations immediately incident to the breach with Rome. Combined with the above factors the English crown held a traditional advantage in relationship to other monarchies in Church affairs which was to give the Reformation in England its particular character. In England there was traditionally a much closer relationship between the crown and the Church in which, by comparison to other monarchies, the English crown exercised more control in Church affairs. This advantage is traceable at least in part to the latitude in Church governmental affairs given by Hildebrand to be exercised by William the Conqueror in England. This freedom in Church governmental affairs resulted in a close connection between the English monarchy and Church in which, as in the Normandy tradition,

¹¹Dix, op. cit., p. 627.

the ultimate authority of the Papcy was acknowledged, while all but the most important of decisions concerning Church policy were made by the local Church under the close control of the King.¹² The result of this English tradition of "secular" influence over the affairs of Church government was that while most scholars are correct that the English Reformation was at first political rather than theological, it was the traditional strength of the Crown which made it possible and comprehensible for Cranmer to bring about the reforms that he did while not completely destroying the Church in England or the English nation itself. The traditional control of the English monarch in affairs of the Church is the only possible explanation of the ease with which most Englishmen were led into the new religion and of the remarkable influence which the central government exercised over almost all areas of the Reformation. As T. M. Parker writes concerning the role of the Crown in the Reformation, "It is probably true to say that only the English monarchy could have carried through the English Reformation without destroying the country: no other contemporary autocracy could have accomplished such a tour de force."¹³

¹²T. M. Parker, The English Reformation to 1558 (London: Oxford University Press, 1950), p. 9.

¹³Ibid., p. 8.

The strong traditional position of the English Crown in relation to the control it exercised over the Church is important in our understanding of the theology of Thomas Cranmer and the influence on Cranmer of the theologians from the Continent. Combined with any evaluation of the influence of Continental theologians on the Archbishop of Canterbury is the charge that Cranmer was inconsistent in his theological thinking in the worst way. This inconsistency is attributed not to theological maturing and development but rather to opportunism and self advancement by Cranmer critics. If a true and fair evaluation of the influence of continental Protestantism on Cranmer's thinking is to be had, this charge of inconsistency must be answered; and the traditional strength of the English Crown in relation to the Church provides the key to this problem. As C. H. Smyth and other scholars point out, Cranmer was an erastian, and indeed only by substituting the Crown for Papal authority could the Church become independent.¹⁴ The Church of England was a result of the development of Royal Supremacy and the Church could not survive without it. Indeed we must be careful not to condemn Cranmer for his support of Royal Supremacy any more than condemning him for living in the 16th Century rather than the 20th. Patriotism and religion were

¹⁴C. H. Smyth, Cranmer and the Reformation Under Edward VI (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1926), p. 47.

more closely tied in the 16th Century than today, and as has been pointed out the Reformation in England was at first a rebellion against alien domination rather than a controversy over doctrine.¹⁵ When it is seen that Cranmer no more than his long time antagonist Gardiner was an erastian, much of Cranmer's seeming theological inconsistency is explained. The specific difficulty, for example, of Cranmer's celebrating the Mass while personally believing it to be idolatrous is explained by Cranmer's erastianism--his strong feelings of responsibility to royal authority. Cranmer was very much aware of his position being Archbishop of England and any wild and open theological or ritual deviation on his part would have resulted in anarchy within the Church and nation. The facts indicate that as the Archbishop became dissatisfied with such superstitions as creeping to the cross, etc., he applied to King Henry for their removal, approval for which was given and then retracted.¹⁶ Cranmer's desire to remove superstitions from the Mass is an attempt as a man of his age to produce a synthesis between his theological beliefs and his convictions concerning his duty towards his King. One must agree with the contention made by C. H. Smyth that Cranmer was not a time-server but that he possessed qualities

¹⁵Smyth, op. cit., p. 30.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 33.

of patience and obtained his ends by attempting to persuade his King, and others who opposed him, through reason and compromise rather than through defiance of authority.¹⁷ The importance of seeing Thomas Cranmer as a man who was willing to compromise in an age of extremes, as a man who was willing to bend and give up minor points to gain major ones, is that these very characteristics dictate his potential acceptance and assimilation of the theological doctrines offered by the Continental Reformers. It is these unusual abilities, unusual for any age but truly extraordinary in his own, to have patience and to see the value of the other side of the argument, that allowed Cranmer to make his great contribution to the formation of the Anglican Church. Had Thomas Cranmer given way to the extreme views held by some of the Continental Reformers whom he called on to help reform the Church in England, the Anglican Church could easily have become a vestige of Lutheranism or an unhappy amalgamation of Calvinism and Zwinglianism. But for Cranmer's abilities, the Church could have dissolved into anarchy and returned permanently to Rome rather than becoming the unique product it is. If Cranmer had not been a man who was willing and able to ascertain the relative value of what each reformer had to offer and to a great extent follow the middle way between extremes

¹⁷Smyth, op. cit., p. 34.

while not abandoning the great traditions of the Church, his reforms, particularly in the liturgical field, would not have had their lasting effect. Much of Cranmer's restraint and moderation in the face of insistant demands on the part of many extremists can be attributed to his patience and statesmanship, as well as good judgement as to what was sound liturgically and theologically and at the same time acceptable to people and King. It is Cranmer's basic loyalty to the idea of Royal Supremacy which prevents him from moving in direct opposition to the desires of his King. Cranmer's erastianism, even after King Henry's death, to a large degree contributes to his moderation of action, and this element of Cranmer's character cannot be ignored as we attempt to evaluate his dependence on continental theology in reforming the Church in England.

CHAPTER IV

THE EDUCATION OF AN ARCHBISHOP

Some reference must be made to Cranmer's early education and his life at Cambridge, for the Archbishop spent a good portion of his life at this school. Most likely Cranmer would have ended his days in the quiet back-water of the university had he not been propelled somewhat against his will into the light of history. The Cambridge period of Cranmer's life is also important, because it is during this time that he first came into contact with the thinking of the Continental Reformers and had the leisure to spend an extensive period of time studying the new theology.

Before going up to Cambridge Cranmer's earlier schooling was at the hands of, as all of his biographers state, a 'rude parish clerk' who was evidently an exponent of the terrible educational philosophy of the period, which dictated that if one spared the rod the child was spoiled; hence, Thomas was beaten regularly by his ill educated tutor. Jasper Ridley dismisses as unlikely the contention of many of Cranmer's biographers that the cruel actions of the schoolmaster were responsible for a defect in his character, and that Cranmer's statements against harsh educational methods simply point to the Archbishop's advanced educational ideas

in comparison to those held by many of his contemporaries.¹⁸ The relationship between the young Thomas and his father seems to have been excellent. The senior Cranmer taught his son to ride and to shoot the longbow as well as to develop his taste for hunting. Rather than claiming that Thomas Cranmer's early life might have warped him, one is more inclined to observe that he had a better than average teenage period, even by the standards of today and certainly by comparison to many of his contemporaries. The death of Cranmer's father in 1501, while certainly a personal loss, did not interfere with his formal education, for some two years later he was sent to Jesus College, Cambridge.

The university which Cranmer entered in Ca. 1503 was far different than the great Cambridge of today. Writing of Cranmer's education at Jesus College, Pollard reports that the library of the University contained between five and six hundred volumes at the end of the 15th Century and that not one of the great classical Greek or Latin authors was to be found in the collection.¹⁹ The level of instruction and quality of work expected at Cambridge was not of the highest. Almost all of Cranmer's biographers report the comment of a contemporary biographer of the Archbishop who states that he

¹⁸Ridley, op. cit., p. 15.

¹⁹Albert F. Pollard, Thomas Cranmer and the English Reformation (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1906), p. 13.

was, 'nosseled in the grossest kind of sophistry, logic, philosophy moral and natural, not in the text of the old philosophers, but chiefly in the dark riddles and quiddities of Duns and other subtle questionists.' Albert Pollard reports that Cranmer himself recalled that some of his tutors at Jesus College were less than brilliant and would skip over any part of a subject with which they were not in command and go on to an easier area.²⁰ While the level of instruction available at Jesus College may have left much to be desired from our modern point of view, it was certainly no worse than that obtainable to most men who were preparing for Holy Orders and in all probability a great deal better. It is also very likely that the poor level and form of instruction, a common complaint of undergraduates even today, may have led Cranmer as well as others at the school to search and read more diligently themselves and to draw more of their own conclusions from what was available for their consumption.

We do not know why young Thomas Cranmer took his university education at the Cambridge College which had been founded only some six years before he entered, yet it was a fortunate choice from the point of view of the English Reformation. Although Cambridge had its academic short comings, it was here that the greatest and most sympathetic interest in the

²⁰Pollard, op. cit., p. 13.

ideas of Luther was to develop. Cambridge rather than Oxford was to be the leader in welcoming the reforming or heretical (depending on one's point of view) teachings of Luther and other reformers.

The reception which the theological views of Luther received in Cambridge is shown by the "secret" meetings of those interested in Lutheranism at the White Horse Inn for discussion. The extent of the influence exerted by the Monk of Wittenberg at Cambridge could be measured by the fact that the White Horse Inn became known as "Germany" and those who visited there regularly as "Germans." During this period of interest in the "heretical" views of Martin Luther at the university, Cranmer was studying for his doctor's degree at Cambridge. Subsequent to entering the university Cranmer became a fellow, married, became a widower, had his Fellowship reinstated--incidentally an extraordinary event for no other widower received a Fellowship for some two hundred years after Cranmer--and finally entered Holy Orders sometime around 1520.²¹ While Cranmer prepared for his doctor's degree the concern over the heresy which had infested the University had reached such a level and spread to such a degree that King Henry himself felt called on to make an official statement condemning the Lutheran heresy, while Fisher and

²¹Ridley, op. cit., p. 20.

Wolsey began an intense campaign against the heresy.²² The first reaction of Cranmer to the teachings of the Monk from Wittenburg provides us with an interesting and important insight into his character. Cranmer's response to the ideas of Luther was not to join in with the group at the White Horse Inn and rant against prayers for the dead, etc.; rather he turned to a systematic study of Scripture and the Early Fathers. For some three years Cranmer was to study both sides of the issues surrounding the teaching of Luther. Ridley, in his work Thomas Cranmer, makes an excellent point concerning the significance of the way in which Cranmer reacted to the controversy of Luther's teachings, when he writes that Cranmer was an "incipient heretic." Cranmer not only read barred heretical tracts but as an orthodox priest did not condemn Luther simply and solely on the authority of the Church but rather judged between Luther and the Church on the basis of his own private understanding and interpretation of the Bible.²³ Jasper Ridley is correct when he states that by these very actions Cranmer was, "already a heretic in his heart, even if he did not know it."²⁴ These scholarly efforts of Cranmer in spending some three years, not three weeks or months, looking at all sides of an argument would carry

²²Ridley, op. cit., p. 21; and Pollard, op. cit., p. 21.

²³Ridley, op. cit.

²⁴Ibid.

over into his later life. The quiet, scholarly response of Thomas Cranmer to the new ideas of Luther laid the ground work for the prelude to actions throughout the rest of his theological life. The very fact that Cranmer did not respond to these new ideas by joining in an open and vocal objection to the established Church or religion at the White Horse Inn was typical of him and shows that while he was willing to listen and certainly to extensively investigate new ideas, these ideas needed a great deal of time to be assimilated before they bore fruit. Cranmer could not be accused of acting on information and ideas which he himself had not carefully studied.

The first seeds of interest in the theological teachings of Luther would seem to have been planted and at least to have begun their germination while Cranmer was a fellow at Cambridge University. Yet of all the theological thoughts and concepts which Cranmer was to wrestle with during his life, it was at Cambridge that he became convinced of the great importance of studying the Bible rather than only scholastic theology. When Cranmer was made one of the university's examiners in divinity, after he took his doctor of divinity degree in 1526, many of his biographers report that he diligently examined all candidates for the bachelor of divinity degree for their knowledge of Scripture and Biblical history. As Strype reports of Cranmer as an examiner,

"...for he used to examine those candidates out of the Scripture; and by no means would he let them pass if he found they were unskilled in it, and unacquainted with the history of the Bible."²⁵ Attempts to claim that Cranmer became a "Lutheran" while a fellow or doctor at Cambridge came perilously close to reading presuppositions, deduced from actions taken and doctrines taught by Thomas Cranmer after he left Cambridge, back into the period he spent as a part of that learned community. Yet Lutheranism aside there can be no doubt that of all the doctrines Cranmer was to expound on later in life, it was while at Cambridge that he became convinced as to the importance of the supremacy of Scripture. For it was while at Cambridge and in response to the new teachings which came from the Monk of Wittenburg that Cranmer began a diligent and detailed study of Scripture. His conduct as an examiner in divinity points to an early and strong conviction on the part of Cranmer as to the great importance of Scripture in the field of theology. During an age in which knowledge of the Bible, even among the clergy, was at a deplorably low level and when his insistence on Biblical knowledge as a degree requirement caused resentment in certain ecclesiastic areas, Cranmer as an examiner was adamant in his demands concerning

²⁵John Strype, Memorials of Archbishop Thomas Cranmer (Oxford: The University Press, 1840), I, p. 4.

knowledge of Scripture.²⁶ From what we have already seen of Cranmer's personality as indicated by his response in study rather than action or discussion at the White Horse Inn to the ideas of Luther, his unusual and powerful insistence on Biblical knowledge among Cambridge degree candidates indicates the great importance he placed on the superiority of Scripture at such an early date in his life. It is impossible to gauge with any accuracy the extent to which Cranmer accepted the teachings of Luther while at Cambridge, yet it can be said that the first and strongest influence to come to bear on Thomas Cranmer's thinking from the continent was in the area of the superiority of Scripture.

²⁶Strype, op. cit., p. 4.

CHAPTER V

THE WRITINGS OF CONTINENTAL REFORMERS AND THOMAS CRANMER

Thomas Cranmer as a scholar and member of the faculty of a university had the works of Luther as well as other Protestant authors available for study. The reaction of Cranmer to the works of Luther in setting about in a systematic study of scripture may indeed have made him, in the words of his modern biographer Jasper Ridley, "an incipient heretic," but this reaction leaves no doubt as to the influence of the printed word on a man such as Cranmer. In Cranmer's early explorations into the thinking of Protestant reformers, he found writings produced by those men which must have had a profound influence on his thinking. The writings of Luther were quickly and extensively available in England, as the records of one John Dorne, a bookseller at Oxford, show. Master Dorne sold a great many books by Luther only some three years after the Wittenburg Monk nailed his Theses to the Church door.²⁷ By 1521 the number of Lutheran books in England was sufficient to cause alarm in orthodox quarters and concern at what was being read in the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge. When Luther was declared a heretic

²⁷Frederick J. Smithen, Continental Protestantism and the English Reformation (London: James Clarke & Co. Ltd., 1927), p. 45.

the orthodox hierarchy in England headed by Cardinal Wolsey saw fit to have a public burning of Luther's book, and by 1529 an "Index" of Prohibited Books was published which included most of Luther's writings as well as the works of Oecolampodius, Billicanus, Zwingli, Bugenhagen, Bucer, Regius, Melancthon, Agricola, Brentz, Lambert, Wessel, Gochius, and Carlstadt.²⁸ As is usually the case with censorship it is not likely that these attempts to ban Protestant books did more than drive them underground, and human nature being as it is, probably increased the desire to read them. The need of the orthodox authority in England to publish an Index of Prohibited Books--and the extensive list of Protestant reformers represented on this index--can only lead one to believe that those in sympathy with the Protestant Reformation who were living in England had every opportunity to keep abreast of the latest theological thinking from the continent. It can further be deduced that this Protestant literature was considered a real threat by the then established Church in England, for they considered it necessary to ban and burn these Protestant books. Prior to the break with Rome by Henry VIII there was enough Protestant literature being read in England that it can be said that continental authors had laid some intellectual ground work for

²⁸Smithen, op. cit., p. 45.

the advance of the Reformation in England. After the Church in England separated herself from Rome, King Henry was more sympathetic to having the writings of Protestants in his kingdom, particularly as he was now interested in securing some measure of support from the Germans. With the death of Henry and the rise of Edward VI to the throne of England, an unlimited number of Protestant publications entered England from the continent. The Paraphrase of Erasmus in an English translation appeared in 1547 and by 1548 the works of Luther, Zwingli, Calvin, Melanchthon, Bullinger, Urbanus, Regius, Osiander, Hegendorp, and Bodius were to be found in England.²⁹ While most of these Protestant works were published in cheap pamphlet form, aimed at circulation among the common people, their impact on the man in the street can only be measured by the fact that Mary was welcomed back to the throne; and the return to Rome was accomplished with a majority of popular support. Our concern for the literary production of the continental Protestants is mainly with the influence they exerted on the religious and intellectual leaders of England and particularly on Thomas Cranmer. Therefore we will turn from the short general sketch of the influence and availability of Protestant writings in 16th Century England to a look at specific authors and their influences on the development of Thomas Cranmer's theology.

²⁹Smithen, op. cit., p. 47.

There can be no doubt that Cranmer was if not greatly influenced at least stimulated in his theological thinking by the great deluge of Protestant literature which was available in England. It is almost impossible to claim that at any specific time Cranmer became convinced through reading, let us say Luther's writing, that Scripture had ultimate superiority over all other authorities. Yet it can be said, as was observed earlier in this work, that it was during the period Cranmer was in Cambridge--possibly during the years 1516 to 1517--when Luther began his writings and Erasmus published his Greek Testament that he became convinced of the supremacy of Scripture. As far as possible the original Greek and Hebrew were used by Cranmer and he attempted to return to the original meaning of the texts, cutting through the layers of scholastic and patristic commentary. Finally in his theological searchings Cranmer returned to the principles of humanism and attempted to disregard allegorical interpretation of the Bible and return to its primary and literal meaning.³⁰ The first of what might be called continental influence brought to bear on Cranmer was in the area of scripture, and it is possible to say that this influence was more from the Humanists rather than the Lutherans. At least the spirit of humanism was the ground on which the investigation

³⁰G. W. Bromiley, Thomas Cranmer Theologian (New York: Oxford University Press, 1956), p. 13.

of scripture grew when inquiry was stimulated by Luther and other Protestant thinkers. Indeed F. J. Smithen is partly correct when he writes,

"...Cranmer was a Humanist, and ought to be classed as a disciple of Erasmus rather than Luther. The more radical reformers may have attributed his failure to go as far and as fast along the road of reformation as they wished to lack of courage or sloth, but in all fairness to him we must remember that he was imbued with the moderate spirit of Humanism, and hence was not given to the enthusiasms and extravagances of a Luther."³¹

G. W. Bromilly states that Cranmer was, "...indebted to humanistic influences," for the first and liberating change which came in his thinking concerning Scripture even in the face of the old learning which he had received at Cambridge.³² There are other scholars of the English Reformation who would give a great deal of emphasis to the influence of the humanists, particularly Wycliffe, on the formation of English Reformation theology. A. F. Pollard writes of the influence of Wycliffe on the Reformation in England,

"The origin of these new doctrines or heresies in England is not correctly ascribed to Luther; the spread of Lutheranism on the continent undoubtedly gave impetus to the movement in England but the views of the English Reformers approach so much more nearly to those of Wycliffe than to those of Luther, that the Englishman rather than the German must be regarded as the morning star of the Anglican Reformation. Even as Wycliffe had done, so Cranmer...looked to the state to reform a corrupt Church."³³

³¹Smithen, op. cit., p. 74.

³²Bromiley, op. cit., p. 13.

³³Pollard, op. cit., p. 90.

It was the humanistic teaching of men like Wycliffe and Erasmus which at a very basic level opened Thomas Cranmer's mind so that he was able to take mostly what was best from the offerings of Continental Reformers. That Cranmer was ever a student in an official sense of Erasmus is unlikely as Cranmer never mentions it, yet the ethos produced by humanists such as Erasmus had a profoundly liberalizing influence on Cranmer as well as other English reformers.

The early influence of Continental thinking on Thomas Cranmer at first came on two levels: one, the very basic and almost unconscious influence of the whole ethos of humanism through the Englishman Wycliff down through Erasmus; and secondly, on the very conscious but no less important realm, of the supremacy of Holy Scripture over all other authorities. With these two influences in mind let us now turn to look more closely at several documents published during Henry's reign and evaluate the influence of the published works of Continental Theologians on them.

The first systematic doctrinal statement by Henry's government was the publication of a series of articles in 1536.³⁴ In no case could King Henry be called a Protestant in his theological thinking. Henry was willing and able to allow some reforms to take place within the Church, but only

³⁴Smithen, op. cit., p. 153.

if those changes were advantageous politically and economically. Any Protestant tinge which Royal authority allowed in the Ten Articles published in 1536 served a political purpose, from Henry's point of view, of possibly aiding him in gaining the alliance he was seeking with the Lutherans, who were demanding some statement of theology from the English. King Henry was further motivated to allow a more Protestant statement of theology by his need for increased revenues. As Jasper Ridley observes of the theological reforms which Henry permitted to begin within the English Church:

"The doctrinal reformation which began in 1536 would hardly have occurred had it not been for the suppression of the monasteries and the desirability of accomplishing this with propaganda against the doctrine peculiarly associated with the monks."³⁵

The political and economic motivations that were involved in the publication of the Ten Articles in 1536 are german to the problem of evaluating the extent and importance of Continental Protestant influence on Cranmer, not only in this period but all through his life, because it must be stressed that religion and politics were inexorably tied together in the 16th Century. The juxtaposition of religious and political considerations, as witnessed to by the overly simplified "outside" influences bearing on the publication of Ten Articles in 1536 illustrated above, shows that it is

³⁵Ridley, op. cit., p. 95.

dangerous to make assumptions concerning the reasons behind the Archbishop's supposed acceptance or rejection of a continental theological idea based solely on what was officially published by the government as authorized statements of doctrine. As was earlier mentioned, Cranmer had statesman-like qualities which made it possible for him to forego part of his own beliefs in the interest of salvaging most of them, and he was willing to compromise in the hope of advancing what he believed to be truly important.

The Ten Articles or as they are called in one version, "Articles Devised by the King's Highness" and in another copy "Articles about Religion Set Out by the Convocation, and published by the King's Authority" have about them an air of compromise between the Old and New Learning.³⁶ These articles maintain much of the old theology while having about them a feeling of the new, for example the number of Sacraments is reduced to three; indeed it would seem that the author of these Articles was in some degree influenced by the Augsburg Confession. There are similarities between the way the Ten Articles and the Augsburg Confession are divided--first the articles on faith and then those on ceremonies in both documents.³⁷ In the interest of brevity in dealing with this

³⁶Smithen, op. cit., p. 154.

³⁷Ibid., p. 155.

area of published writing of Continental Reformers, we will move on to a consideration of the influence of the Augsburg Confession on the Thirteen Articles of 1538 which, while never becoming an official statement of doctrinal beliefs of the English Church, did have a strong influence on the later formation of the Thirty-Nine Articles. In 1538 King Henry, influenced by Cromwell's foreign policy and seeming disposition to enter into an alliance with the Germans, allowed a conference with the Lutherans to take place. As noted above the production of the Ten Articles was in part influenced by Henry's desire to obtain union with the German Princes, so much more was the case with the Thirteen Articles. The Lutherans seemed sure that such an alliance between England and Germany was possible, as C. H. Smyth writes concerning this venture, "Melanchthon sincerely desired, and confidently expected a religious concordat on the basis of the Augsburg Confession, which would bring England into line with Wittenburg."³⁸ Cranmer must have been in favor of this union for he was mainly responsible for the Thirteen Articles, which closely parallel the Augsburg Confession, as a means by which union could be accomplished. As a further incentive Cranmer engaged in drawing up a liturgy based on the Lutheran pattern.³⁹ From this evidence alone, the great

³⁸Smyth, op. cit., p. 34.

³⁹Ibid., p. 35.

similarity between the Thirteen Articles and the Augsburg Confession and the Lutheran-based liturgy one would deduce that Cranmer was strongly influenced by the Confession and the Lutheran theological position. Such was not the case, in fact contrary to common supposition; this paper will contend that Cranmer was never a Lutheran in any formal theological sense but rather was attracted to the Lutheran position because of its moderation in comparison to the extremes of some other Protestant doctrines. The Thirteen Articles and Lutheran negotiation again demonstrate Cranmer's pre-disposition and ability to move towards the center and more moderate position in theological discussion.

The fact that Cranmer could, and did negotiate with the Lutherans in good faith, and yet was able to submit to Henry's reaction to the failure of the German alliance and general dislike of "Lutheran" doctrines with the June of 1539 Act of Six Articles does not discredit the Archbishop as much as it might. It may seem that if Cranmer was able to accept the Augsburg Confession it would be almost impossible for him to accept the Six Articles which enforced belief in Transubstantiation, non-necessity of Communion in both kinds, the celibacy of the clergy, the obligation of chastity or widowhood, the necessity of private Masses, and the need for auricular confession. The correct evaluation of Cranmer's actions in seemingly indulging in a complete reversal of theological

thinking to accommodate his monarch is best explained by the fact that Cranmer was always afraid that the Church of England would become isolated.⁴⁰ C. H. Smyth is correct in his evaluation of the Archbishop's seemingly deceitful vacillation from Wittenburg to a Roman doctrine expressed in the Six Articles when he observes that Cranmer saw in the Lutheran alliance an opportunity to produce a central party within reformed Christendom made up of the Catholic Party of Reform and the Moderate Party of Reformation: this central party would be strong enough to insure reform and yet prevent complete revolution within the Church.⁴¹ Cranmer in accepting the Augsburg Confessional statement on the Eucharist verbatim was able to see that this Eucharistic statement had been purposely made ambiguous so as to make its acceptance possible by both sides, and he was forced to concede nothing to the Lutherans in the area of doctrine.⁴² When the conference with the Lutherans became a failure, Cranmer, who had really given no theological ground to the Germans, was then able to attempt to strengthen his position with the Catholic party in England which was gaining support with the King. As the actions of Cranmer in the attempted alliance with the Lutherans show, much of his acceptance of the theological doctrines of the

⁴⁰Smyth, op. cit., p. 36.

⁴¹Ibid.

⁴²Ibid.

Continental theologians was influenced by his desire to have the Church in England be the means by which the best of the old theology and tradition could be combined with the new. The meeting with the Germans also showed that while Cranmer was strongly desirous of a coalition and placed great confidence in conferences, he was limited in his actions by the desires of his King, his strong erastianism, and finally that he had limits past which he would not go in his theological condensations to achieve union. During the conference with the Lutherans Cranmer conceded no point of doctrine to the Germans, and when an impasse was reached concerning the understanding of the Eucharist Cranmer was willing to abandon the project. Thomas Cranmer was not in favor of union at all costs; he would bend and he would meet with other reformers but he would not give up everything in order to gain a giant "Protestant" Church.

There are scholars of the English Reformation who would maintain that attempts to claim that Cranmer was never a Lutheran are at variance with the evidence and would right the fact that Cranmer was influenced by the Catechism of Justas Jonas, for he translated it into English. Justas Jonas had produced a Latin version of the Nurnberg Kinderpredigten, which contained Luther's Small Catechism verbatim.⁴³

⁴³Smithen, op. cit., p. 76.

This same Nurnberg Kinderpredigten had originally been an appendix to the Brandenburg-Nurnberg Kirchenordnung, the combined work of Osiander and Brentz published in 1533.⁴⁴ There is however a subtle difference between the Catechism of Justus Jonas and that produced by Cranmer, for the Archbishop omitted key words and rendered other parts of the Catechism so as not to suggest the Lutheran doctrines. In speaking to the question of Cranmer's acceptance of Lutheran theology G. W. Bromiley writes, "It is also true that in his translation of the catechism of Justus Jonas he deliberately altered the original so as not to propagate the peculiar Lutheran tenent."⁴⁵ The final answer to the question: Was Cranmer ever a Lutheran can be found by looking at the changes which Cranmer made when he translated the Catechism of Justus Jonas, so often used to prove Cranmer's acceptance of Lutheran doctrine. The original Catechism of Jonas reads:

"God is almighty. Therefore He can do all things as He will....[When He calls and names a thing which was not before, then at once the very thing comes into being, as He names it.] Therefore when He takes bread and says: 'this is my body,' then immediately there is the body of our Lord. And when He takes the Chalice and says: 'this is my blood,' then immediately His blood is present."⁴⁶

In his translation of Jonas's Catechism Cranmer left out the words enclosed in brackets in the above and translated the

⁴⁴Smithen, op. cit., p. 77.

⁴⁵Bromiley, op. cit., p. 69. ⁴⁶Smyth, op. cit., p. 52.

remainder as:

"...wherefore when Christ takes bread and saith: 'Take eat, this is my body,' we ought not to doubt but we eat His very body; and when He takes the cup and saith: 'Take, drink, this is my blood,' we ought to think assuredly that we drink His very blood."⁴⁷

It is impossible not to agree with the contention of C. H. Smyth as well as other scholars that Cranmer's change in the Catechism of Justas Jonas does not indicate Lutheran theological leanings but in fact suggests Suvermerian doctrine.

Attempts to evaluate the influence of the Augsburg Confession and other Lutheran writings on Thomas Cranmer's theological developments are not helped by the correspondence we have between different Continental Reformers of the period. An example of the confusion which these correspondences create can be seen by looking at a letter written by John Ab Ulmis to Bullinger concerning the despair that Ab Ulmis felt because of the Lutheran leanings which Cranmer supposedly held. The reason for John Ab Ulmis's despair over the theology of Cranmer was, in his words:

"...For he (Cranmer) has lately published a Catechism in which he has not only approved that foul and sacrilegious transubstantiation of the papists in the Holy Supper of our Saviour, but all the dreams of Luther seem to him sufficiently well-grounded, perspicuous and lucid."⁴⁸

Amazing as it seems the Catechism which caused such theological alarm to Ab Ulmis is the very same translation, recorded

⁴⁷Smyth, op. cit., p. 52.

⁴⁸Ibid.

above, which Cranmer made from the Latin Catechism of Justas Jonas, including the important changes which Cranmer made when he rendered the document into English. The same expression of concern over the Lutheran tendencies of the Archbishop of Canterbury because of the translation he published of Jonas's Catechism, supposedly under the influence of Peter Martyr, was also reported by Burcher in a letter to Bullinger.⁴⁹ The only deduction which is possible concerning the statements about Cranmer's translation of Jonas's Catechism by both Ab Ulmis and Brucher is that neither had read the document. Indeed Ab Ulmis was unable to read English and Burcher was living in Strassburg, not London.⁵⁰ It would seem that their condemnation of the Catechism of Cranmer as Lutheran was based on theological "hear-say" and the fact that the original document had been Lutheran. The reason for this investigation into the background of statements made by two Continental Reformers to a third about the theological activities of Thomas Cranmer is to point out that the 16th Century, even more than our present age, was subject to individuals reporting as truth information that was unfounded in fact. The correspondence of the Continental Reformers may have been a source of influence on the theological thinking of Cranmer,

⁴⁹Smithen, op. cit., p. 77.

⁵⁰Smyth, op. cit., p. 51.

but great caution must be exercised in using this correspondence as a source of evaluating the extent of this influence.

Contrary to the views held by several of his contemporaries, it is unlikely that Cranmer was ever a Lutheran in a formal sense. The strongest argument is the voice of Cranmer himself, for he denies in fact or by implication that he was ever a Lutheran, on every occasion that the charge was made.⁵¹ The best evaluation of the influence of the Augsburg Confession and other Lutheran writings on Cranmer is that it was Lutheran theology which first drew Cranmer towards reformed thinking, yet Cranmer never became completely adherent to all tenets of the Wittenburg monk. It is most likely that Cranmer was influenced by the more moderate Lutheran doctrines held by his German wife's uncle, Osiander.⁵²

⁵¹Smyth, op. cit., p. 59.

⁵²Smithen, op. cit., p. 79.

CHAPTER VI

CRANMER AND INDIVIDUAL CONTINENTAL REFORMERS

The influence exerted by individual Protestant Reformers whom Cranmer met and knew personally was far stronger than any influence which was exerted on the Archbishop by the writings of the Reformers. Cranmer came into personal contact with different Continental Reformers in two ways. First, he met a large and scholarly group of "Protestants" when he was sent as the King's Ambassador to the Continent to obtain a favorable statement concerning Henry's divorce from the Universities, a tactic which the King employed at the suggestion of Cranmer.⁵³ During Cranmer's travels on the Continent at the King's business he came into contact with a number of evangelical princes, such as Johnn Friedrich von Sachsen, as well as theologians who had fallen under the influence of Luther. The effect of face to face contact and discussion with many learned men on the subject of Reformed Theology must have had a great effect on Thomas Cranmer. There is a great difference between reading about a subject and having the opportunity to engage in discussion with intelligent and enthusiastic proponents of the subject. The painted word does not hold the same power as that which is

⁵³Pollard, op. cit., p. 43.

enthusiastically spoken. Indeed it was while at Nurnberg that Cranmer came into contact with the Pastor of that city, Osiander, who in the words of Pollard,

"may be roughly described as a Lutheran, differed in several respects from the great Reformer, and favoured a definition of the doctrine of the Eucharist and Justification by Faith which would tend to reconcile them to some extent with Catholic views. His arguments were probably not without effect upon Cranmer's theological development."⁵⁴

It would be unwise to place too much emphasis on the marriage of Cranmer to Osiander's niece as a measure of the influence of the Nurnberg divine on Cranmer's thinking. Yet it is unlikely that a man in Priest's orders would marry the niece of a person he did not respect and admire to some extent. The question of the moral action of Cranmer's marriage to Osiander's niece while in Holy Orders and still under the Canons of Church Law which demanded celibacy of her priests need not concern us other than to observe that Cranmer in all areas of his life seemed to have been a "moral" person, and his act of marrying Margaret can to some small extent indicate the level which his thinking had reached concerning at least the authority of the Church.

By far the greatest over-all influence exercised on Thomas Cranmer's theological thinking came from the large number of Continental Protestants who came, either at the

⁵⁴Pollard, op. cit., p. 49.

Archbishop's request or on their own initiative, to England in the formative period of the English Reformation. Jasper Ridley writes of the important influence exercised by Continental Protestants on the formation of the Second Prayer Book, yet his observations apply to the whole of Cranmer's theological development.

"The role of the foreign theologians--particularly Bucer and Martyr--in the preparation of the second liturgy of the Church of England is a tribute to Cranmer's foresight in attempting to draw around him an association of international Protestant theologians. Cranmer's contacts with Lutheran Germany, his old friendship with Osiander, even his German wife, all served to unite him with the Protestants of Europe."⁵⁵

The influence of Martyr and Bucer to which Dr. Ridley refers was exercised while these men were in England visiting with Cranmer and re-enforces the contention that the greatest influence exercised by Continental Protestants on Thomas Cranmer came when these Protestant Reformers were involved in personal contact with the Archbishop.

The first group of Continental Reformers to visit England were the Lutherans who came during the reign of King Henry, but by far the most important influence came from those Continentals who visited Cranmer after Henry's death. King Henry himself had asked that a group of German scholars be sent to England from Germany and specifically requested

⁵⁵Ridley, op. cit., p. 327.

that Melanchthon, whom he admired, be sent.⁵⁶ The delegation which finally reached England consisted of Francis Burckhardt--vice Chancellor to the Elector of Saxony, George Boyneburg--a doctor of Law and nobleman of Hesse, and Frederic Mecum described as 'Superintendent' of the Church at Gotha; Melanchthon was unable or unwilling to make the journey.⁵⁷

As was noted earlier in this work Henry's reasons for seeking an alliance with the Germans was not only to "plant the sound doctrine of Christian religion in his kingdoms, and wholly to take away and abolish the impious ceremonies of the bishop of Rome," but also to gain political and economic advantages. While there was apparently acceptable compromise on matters of doctrine the conference became stagnated over questions of ritual, and as Henry's desire for alliance waned the conference ended in accomplishing nothing. While the conference accomplished nothing in the area of German-English union, the presence of the German divines in England and the opportunity for dialogue which this presented to Crammer had some influence on his thinking. As we have seen the Augsburg Confession influenced the Thirteen Articles and thus later developments in English theology. A second visit to England by the German ambassadors bore no fruit; apparently there were no formal negotiations during this visit.

⁵⁶Smithen, op. cit., p. 102.

⁵⁷Ibid.

The fact that the death of King Henry initiated from the Archbishop of Canterbury a large number of invitations to Continental Reformers to come to England would indicate that Cranmer had been restricted by his King from reforming the Church of England as much as he would have liked.⁵⁸ The desire on the part of Cranmer to obtain the best advice from the finest minds of Continental Protestantism is also a reflection of the Archbishop's basic good senses and desire to have the Church of England, as much as possible, remain in the center of the stream of Reformation. It may be valid to maintain as do many scholars that the theological wind in England was changing from Lutheranism towards the teachings of Zwingli at the time Edward VI came to the throne, yet Thomas Cranmer was attempting to maintain a theological equilibrium within his Church and wisely sought to protect her from the extreme views of right wing Protestantism. That Cranmer refused to be stampeded into the Zwinglian theological camp is indicated by the wide range of theological views represented by those Continental Reformers whom he invited to visit England to consult with him.⁵⁹ Those who came to England, at the Archbishop's bidding, expounded Lutheran and Reformed theology as well as what could be called

⁵⁸Smithen, op. cit., p. 76.

⁵⁹Ibid.

a middle-party represented by men like Bucer, who was one of the most important of those who came to England because of the great influence he exerted on Cranmer. There are some scholars of the Reformation who believe that the theological picture in England at the time Edward VI was on the throne might have been different had Melanchthon accepted Archbishop Cranmer's repeated invitations to come to England to exert his influence. But Melanchthon could not or would not come, and his influences were only secondary.

CHAPTER VII

MARTIN BUCER AND THOMAS CRANMER

Among the Reformers who reached England from the Continent certainly one of the most influential was Martin Bucer. In fact of all the Reformers, Bucer had the most influence on the thinking of Thomas Cranmer of any of the learned Protestant divines who were to journey to England. There are many striking similarities between the ex-Dominican Bucer and the Fellow of Jesus College, Cambridge, who became Archbishop of all England and then so greatly shaped and influenced the Reformation of the Church in England.

Martin Bucer, the son of a cobbler, born in Schlettstadt, Alsace, received an excellent early education at the fine Latin school in his home city, prior to entering the 'reformed' Dominican monastery in Schlettstadt in order to continue his studies.⁶⁰ The Dominicans terrified the young Bucer, through threats of eternal damnation, into taking his vows. Further, he was restricted from studying the classics, which were replaced by scholastic theology. So great was the ability of Bucer that he soon became an authority of great note in scholastic theology, possibly the best of all the Reformers, and his order rewarded his industry by sending

⁶⁰Smyth, op. cit., p. 145.

Martin to the University of Heidelberg where he took his Bachelor of Theology degree.⁶¹ While Bucer possibly had the opportunity for a better formal education than Thomas Cranmer, they were both very well educated men by the standards of their time and both well grounded in scholastic theology.

The similarity between Martin Bucer and Thomas Cranmer does not end with their comparable formal education. Bucer, while a student and later Master of Students at the University of Heidelberg, was greatly influenced by the writings of Erasmus. Heidelberg was a center of Humanistic influence in Germany, and just as Cambridge provided a Humanistic ethos for Cranmer so also was the case with the German University with Bucer. The influence of the New Learning on Bucer was even greater than on Cranmer, or at least more public in its manifestations. Bucer was fortunate, for the Prior of his monastery had also fallen under the spell of Humanism and was in fact a Basler. This liberal Prior was disposed to allow the young Bucer to lecture to the students on the Encomium Moriae, while his tutor in Greek permitted him to explore Plato's Symposium.⁶² Cranmer and Bucer had a common background in the influence which Humanism exerted on their thinking. Humanism, in both Cranmer and Bucer, was the key which opened their minds and made them receptive to the new

⁶¹Smyth, op. cit., p. 146.

⁶²Ibid.

and revolutionary theology which was to come first from Germany and later spread its influence through Europe and England. Without the influence of such men as Erasmus, it seems likely that neither Bucer nor Cranmer would have been so moved by the New Theology.

In April of 1518 Bucer attended a disputation between the District-Vicar of the Augustinian Order, Martin Luther, and some opponent, long forgotten. The chance attendance of Bucer at a debate in Heidelberg changed his life, for he was completely converted by the new and startling theology of the Monk from Wittenberg.⁶³ Bucer's conversion to and interest in New Theology was ~~to cause him no~~ end of difficulties. As C. H. Smyth writes concerning the reaction of Bucer's superiors,

"The fact that Luther was three parts heretic was not half so damnable, from the Dominican point of view, as the fact that he was an Augustinian...Bucer's life was made a burden to him...The position had become intolerable, and in September 1520--'aleae jactae,' as he wrote to Spalatin--Bucer retired to Strassburg."⁶⁴

Cranmer's conversion to the New Theology was not as spectacular, nor did it result in the difficulties which came from Bucer's attachment to the ideas of Luther. While Bucer was to undergo more personal and physical discomforts and difficulties as a result of his conversion than Cranmer, he also

⁶³Smyth, op. cit., p. 147.

⁶⁴Ibid.

was in closer personal contact with men like Luther and Melancthon who formed much of his thinking. When Bucer seemed at the very depths of his career--an excommunicated priest, married, and with little money--he came to Strassburg, and in six short years had driven the Bishop of Strassburg from his see city along with the Mass. Bucer's successes in Strassburg are not as important in the evaluation of his influence on the English Reformation as were his efforts in the area of Protestant reunion. It is in the area of concern for reunion among the warring segments of Protestantism that Cranmer and Bucer, for all their other similarities, came closest together. Thomas Cranmer envisioned the Church of England as the *via media* of the Reformation and dreamed of bringing about a union within the newly-forming splinter groups of the Reformation. Bucer was not limited in his efforts to gain reunion among the Protestants by an almost stifling enmeshment in the world of politics as was Cranmer. The Archbishop was first of all a servant of his king, and the affairs of Canterbury were more closely controlled by considerations of state politics, domestic and foreign, than Cranmer may have wished; yet he had little choice but to face the realities of his situation. To state that Bucer did not have to take into consideration the political ethos of the world in which he lived and worked would be incredibly naive. Yet Bucer had more personal freedom in his actions to obtain

unity among the two main Protestant groups than Cranmer ever could have hoped for. To rehearse all the effort which Bucer expended to bring the Lutherans and Zwinglians together would not aid the purpose of this paper. Neither need there be concern with the involved series of leagues and alliances which existed between the German cities and small kingdoms. One conference in which Bucer attempted to draw the Lutherans and followers of Zwingli together must be mentioned, because it marks the advent of Suvermerianism as an independent theological doctrine, points up the great flexibility and compromise of which Bucer was capable as he searched for a middle road in the Protestant world, and finally marks the birth of Strassburg as the city of the Center Party of Protestantism.⁶⁵

It was the Diet of Augsburg in 1530 which presented an opportunity for the Germans and Swiss to get together. When the Swiss would not accept the Augustana Confession drawn up by Luther and Melanchthon, Bucer proposed a compromise confession which was sufficiently vague so as to be acceptable to both sides. In the 18th Article, on the Eucharist, the doctrine of Suvermerianism was stated, "Christ through the Sacraments gives his very body and his very blood truly to be eaten and drunk, for the food and drink of souls, whereby they are raised up into eternal life."⁶⁶ Even this statement was

⁶⁵Smyth, op. cit., p. 150.

⁶⁶Ibid., p. 151.

too much for the Zwinglians and stated too little as far as the Lutherans were concerned. In attempting to draw the Germans and Swiss together, Bucer had placed himself theologically in the middle between the teachings of Luther and Zwingli. Like Cranmer, Bucer saw the value of compromise as a possible means of reconciliation; yet Bucer's attempts at compromise and mediation between the extremes of Continental Protestantism--while long, arduous, and skillful--met only with limited success. In fact Bucer's dream of a "compromise" form of Protestant theology was to bear fruit more in England and with Thomas Cranmer than on the Continent of Europe.

For all his efforts Bucer was unable to maintain a Central Party of Reform in Europe. Bucer, like Cranmer, saw the importance of avoiding extremes and the need for unity within the forces of Protestantism. The statement on the Eucharist produced by Bucer for the Diet of Augsburg indicates that his contribution to sacramental theology was a result of attempting to find a synthesis between Zwinglianism and the teachings of Luther. It would be unfair to Bucer to maintain that his doctrine of Suvermerianism was not truly held, because he developed it as a means for drawing two forces of Protestantism together.

That Cranmer should have been influenced by Bucer is not surprising. The two men, one from Germany and the other English, had more in common and were more alike than any

other two Reformers. Cranmer was attracted to Bucer's doctrine of Suvermerianism, for Cranmer was a man who very much saw the advantage of a middle position between the extremes of not only the Protestant positions, but also between some areas of the Old Religion and the New. Both Cranmer and Bucer had been influenced by Humanism early in their lives, and this common bond was partly responsible for their common "liberal" position--by comparison to their contemporaries--and their willingness to compromise. Again Cranmer and Bucer had a vision of a united reformation and a unity within the world of Protestantism. This common concern was another tie which bound them together. That Cranmer and Bucer had many combined theological interests and concerns is obvious and the influence of Bucer on Cranmer was considerable; though because of a multitude of pressures from other sources, the extent of this influence is not as obvious in the impressions left on the English Church by Bucer. Strype remarks on the death of Bucer "...This year put an end to this learned man's life: of whose counsel and advice our Archbishop made great use in the steps he made for reformation of religion."⁶⁷ Before his death Bucer gave a great deal to his new nation and Church and contributed much to Anglican theology and practice. Cranmer was strengthened in his understanding and acceptance

⁶⁷Strype, op. cit., p. 356.

of Suvermerianism. The respect of the Archbishop for Bucer was such that Bucer's ideas laid the basis for the English Ordinal, and the paper which Bucer wrote, entitled Censura, was to exert a strong influence on the Prayer Book revisions in 1549. So strong was Bucer's influence on Cranmer and the English Church that it did carry over even after his death.

CHAPTER VIII

THE INFLUENCE OF CONTINENTAL PROTESTANTISM ON CRANMER AND THE ENGLISH REFORMATION

That the English Reformation was influenced and shaped by the theology of Continental Protestantism is obvious to any student of English history. That Thomas Cranmer was also influenced by the Reformers from Europe is also equally obvious and true. If it were not for the thinking, writings, and actions of such men as Luther, Zwingli, Peter Martyr, Martin Bucer and many, many others, Cranmer would not have been moved to reform the Church in England in the way he did when the political ethos of 16th Century England presented him with the opportunity. The problem is not in ascertaining if the Protestant Reformers from Europe influenced Cranmer and the English Reformation, but rather, to what extent. Why was Cranmer willing to turn to foreign Reformers, and to what extent did this Continental Protestant influence in the formative days of the developing English Church have on the present Anglican Church?

It is the contention of this paper that Thomas Cranmer's main concern in reforming the Church in England was that this Church contain that which was good from the New Theology while also retaining the good elements of the Old Religion. Cranmer was a true Reformer in that he wished to

reform rather than completely destroy or change every element of the historic Church. The Archbishop was also motivated in his acceptance of Continental theology by a desire to have the Church of England be in the center between the right and left wings of extreme Continental Protestantism. Even after the Archbishop realized that the Church of England was unlikely to ever be the means by which all Protestantism could be drawn together, he did not want to isolate his Church from the rest of Christendom. Cranmer's concern for developing a Church and a theology which could be accepted by all is reflected in those Continental Reformers whom he called from the Continent of Europe to advise him as he did his best to reform the English Church. These learned divines represented almost all areas of thinking which had developed in Europe; and while Cranmer had those whom he favored, all at least obtained a hearing from the Archbishop. As we look back on the age of the formation of the Church of England it is not surprising that some confusion exists as to the specific beliefs held by the Archbishop of Canterbury, for one has only to look at the correspondence of Continental Protestants living in England to see that they often claimed the Archbishop simultaneously to be in two mutually exclusive camps. The seeming theological vacillation on the part of Cranmer is explained by not only the tendency of the Europeans to find only what they wanted to see in Cranmer's theological

thinking, but also because the Archbishop was changing and developing as he sought to truly reform the English Church while not destroying her.

A judgment of the lasting influence of the Continental Reformers on Thomas Cranmer and how they formed his influence on the Reformation of the English Church will miss the point if it is concerned only with establishing that Cranmer developed theologically from Rome through Luther to Zwingli; or, more correctly, that Cranmer became a Suvermerian. Elements of all the above theological doctrines can be found in Cranmer's writings and indeed all influenced Cranmer's thinking. The influence of Continental Protestantism on Cranmer should be described as compound, in that Cranmer wished to take the best from each and produce an amalgamation which could be accepted by as many as possible. Cranmer, it must be remembered, was an erastian and wanted his Church to bind together his nation, and if possible all of Protestantism rather than further break it apart. To be concerned only with Cranmer's doctrinal development is to miss this vital point. That Cranmer's primary concern was true reformation of the English Church and producing a doctrine and liturgy which would be as acceptable to all as possible is reflected in the Continental Protestant who most influenced Cranmer's thinking, Martin Bucer. As was developed in an earlier chapter of this work, Bucer and Cranmer had much in

common, and the ideas of reform which Bucer brought to England were much in line with the ends which Cranmer wished to see as a result of the Reformation in England.

Not all of Cranmer's hopes were realized and not all that he would have wished was accomplished. With the Marian Reaction much of his work was undone. Yet it is fortunate for the Anglican Church today that Cranmer was an intelligent moderate in an age of extremes; a man who produced and guided, to a great extent, the Protestant Reformation in England so that it survived the return to Rome under Mary and became the unique entity it is today. Had Cranmer allowed the extremes of Protestantism to gain the upper hand, the Marian Reaction could have been more lasting in its effect on the Church in England and the Elizabethan Settlement a different thing altogether.

The contribution made by the Reformers from Europe was in providing Cranmer with a wide range of doctrines from which to choose and the opportunity to maintain a balance in England between the more extreme elements of Protestantism, for no one Continental doctrine was able to gain complete acceptance in England. It is Cranmer's wisdom which to a large extent prevented the English Reformation from being destroyed by going too far in any one Protestant direction but rather remained in a position of compromise which made it possible for the English Reformation to survive and produce the modern Anglican Communion.

CHAPTER IX

SUMMARY

This thesis supports the contention that the main influence of Continental Protestantism on Thomas Cranmer's contribution to the English Reformation is first of all in providing the early stimulus which started the Archbishop on the road to Protestantism, through the early influences of Lutheran and other writings while Cranmer was at Cambridge. Once Cranmer had been convinced of the need for reform within the Church and of the truth of the general Protestant position, particularly in the area of supremacy of Scripture, the Protestants provided a wide range of theological options from which Cranmer could choose as he guided the Church in England through her early Reformation. The choice which Cranmer made from the offerings of the Continental Protestants was influenced by his early education, the ethos of Humanism, the traditional relationship of Church and State in England, his strong loyalty to his king, and finally and most strongly by his vision of the Church in England as the center between the extremes of Protestantism, a truly reformed, not destroyed Church. That Cranmer's main concern lay in this area is seen by the strong influence exerted on Cranmer by Martin Bucer whose theology and vision of a Central Protestant Church matched those of the Archbishop.

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